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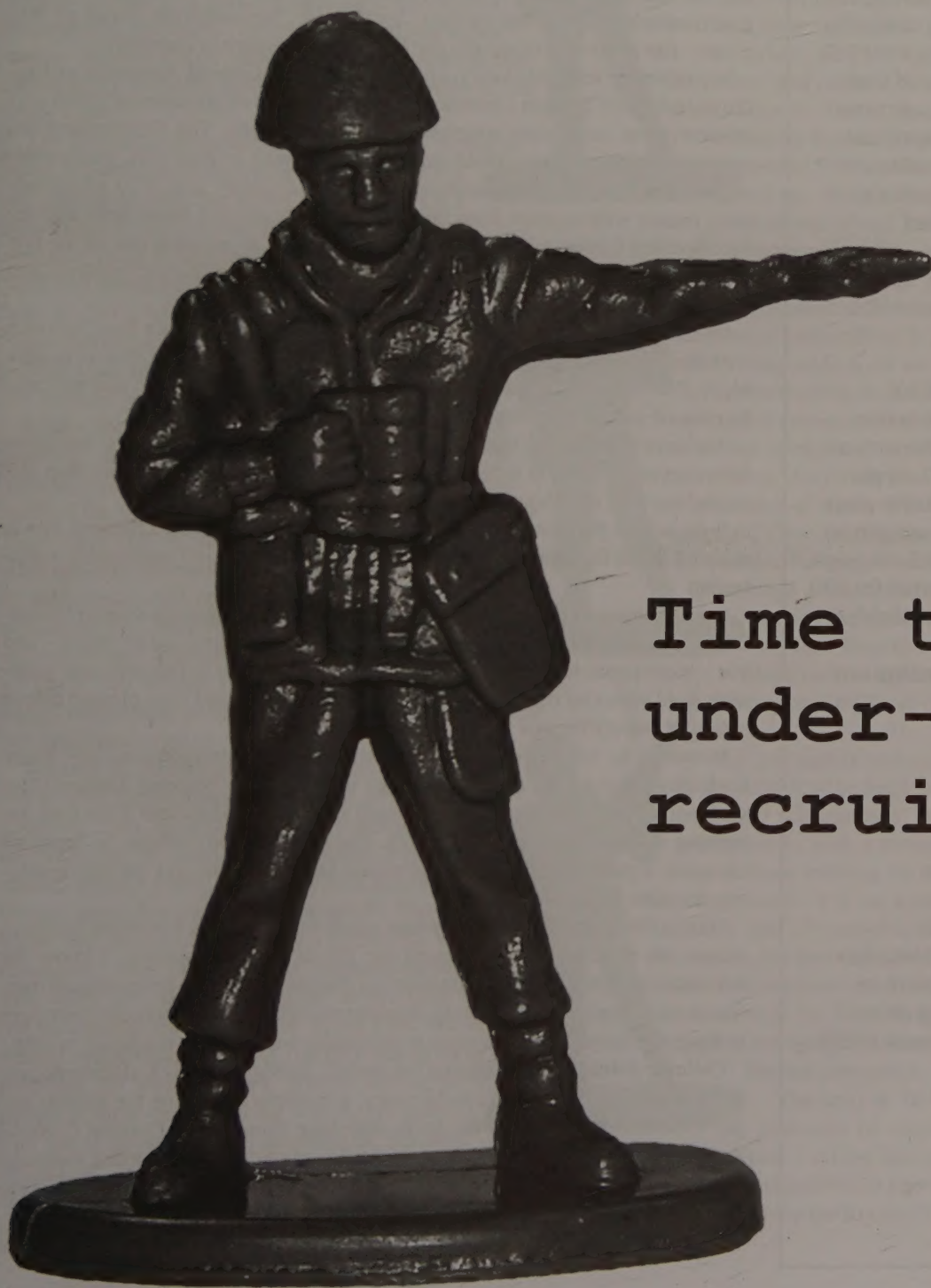
The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7765 5 March 2011

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Time to end
under-18
recruitment

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
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Inquiring Words

It isn't enough to talk about peace, one must believe it.
And it isn't enough to believe in it, one must work for it.

— Eleanor Roosevelt

Civil partnerships

Archbishop blames liberals

The Guardian reported that Catholic leaders 'are on a collision course with the government' over the allowing of Civil Partnership ceremonies in churches:

The archbishop of Southwark, the Most Rev Peter Smith, said it was neither 'necessary nor desirable' to allow gays and lesbians to have civil partnership ceremonies in religious premises and accused the government of 'considering a fundamental change to the status of marriage'.

The Archbishop blamed religious liberals:

There was also implicit criticism of those religions and movements supporting the change – Quakers, Unitarians and Liberal Jews have welcomed the government's modernising agenda. Smith said: 'No authority – civil or religious – has the power to modify the fundamental nature of marriage.'

In response, Derek McAuley, chief officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches said: 'The wheels of government grind ever so slowly but sometimes progress is eventually made. The Government has announced that religious buildings will be allowed to host civil partnership registrations, implementing section 202 in the Equality Act 2010 which had been passed with support from the Unitarians, Quakers, Liberal Jews and the Metropolitan Community Church. The amendment is probably one of the few changes in legislation in recent years that the Denomination can rightly claim to have influenced.'

'We looked forward to its implementation and I have already been in touch with the Equalities Office offering support in the consultation that is to take place. Parliament has said that this was an injustice to be righted and we must be pleased with the Government's response. ...'

'Unitarians recognise that the intentions of same-sex couples are similar to heterosexual couples in entering a legally binding and loving relationship and we believe that this should be recognised in law.'

'I do accept that some religious bodies will not accept the changes; this is allowed for in the Act. No one will be forced to host a civil partnership registration.'

'I am disappointed that the views of minority religious groups such as Unitarians, Quakers and Liberal Jews have been effectively dismissed by larger – and yes – more powerful churches. The changes we seek are in line with our genuinely held views on right relationships between adults and I am pleased that in a secular society the law will increasingly reflect these.'

However, no matter what the Archbishop or other traditionalists say, many Catholics are working toward marriage equality. The National Catholic Reporter (NCR), a US newspaper, pointed out that in Maryland Catholics are fighting to pass a marriage justice bill. The NCR quoted Catholic Sr Jeannine Gramick, a pastoral minister and advocate for lesbian and gay people, testifying at a state legislature hearing:

'The political definition of marriage needs to be fair and free from discrimination. As someone who has spent my life in pastoral ministry, I know the devastating effects of discrimination on people's lives. If heterosexual marriages are recognised by the state, then not recognising same-gender marriages is discriminatory. Such unfairness is politically wrong and it is morally wrong.'

Catholic politicians are fighting for the bill, leading Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, a ministry of justice for lesbian and gay Catholics wrote the book *Marriage Equality: A Positive Catholic Approach*. 'The book shows how faithful Catholics are supporting marriage equality,' she said. 'Catholic lay people have a different approach to the question of marriage equality than their bishops do.'

Amen to that.

— MC Burns

Danger isn't only on the front lines

The UK is the only European nation which recruits 16-year-olds into the Army. It's time to stop signing up underage soldiers

By Michael Bartlett

The punch of the automatic weapon into my shoulder was simultaneous with a shrill whistle of bullets, breaking the silence. It was the only time I fired an automatic weapon with live ammunition. I was 15, a member of Blundell's School, Combined Cadet Force, training at Lymington Commando Centre in Devon. I felt much older than my years. We aimed at concentric circles on the bodies of black and white human shapes in front of a bank of sandbags. The bullets disappeared into them. I felt both a loss of innocence and an uncomfortable sense of physical power. It still informs my thoughts about under-18-year-olds in the army today.

The present recruitment age of 16 is too young to enter full-time military training. If you are not old enough to vote, buy a pint in a pub, to ride a motorbike or even to buy fireworks are you not also too young to join the army? A young soldier trains with live ammunition, yet is deemed to be too young to watch a DVD of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* – an allegory of the insanity of war inspired by Joseph Conrad. Isn't it time we had a more consistent attitude to the age of adult responsibility?

Under the Bill of Rights (1689), to maintain a standing army in peacetime, Parliament needs to vote the exact numbers of soldiers, sailors and airmen each of the three forces can maintain. This 'framework legal discipline' is then set out in an Armed Forces Act. This needs to be re-enacted every five years. The current Armed Forces Bill provides a once-in-a-Parliament opportunity to amend the law relating to the age of recruitment. Quakers are currently supporting an Early Day Motion (EDM 781) calling for the age of recruitment to be raised to 18. It is an issue that is too important to go by 'on the nod'.

Notions of childhood change. The Black Prince led English forces against the French at the Battle of Crécy in 1346. He was barely 16. During the siege of Mafeking in 1900, Robert Baden Powell recruited boys as young as 12 to deliver messages by bicycle under fire and serve in hospitals. They wore khaki and their leader was the 13-year-old Warner Goodyear, who became their sergeant-major. But they were not part of the regular army. They became the forerunners of Boy Scouts. In the First World War when Lord Kitchener sought 100,000 men prior to conscription, his poster offered 'general service for a period of three years until the war is concluded'. The age of enlistment was specified as 'between 19 and 30'. In 1915 no one was eligible for direct enlistment until they were 19 (Hansard November 1915). It is true many circumvented the rules.

Ninety years after the end of the First World War, Britain is

now the only country in Europe to recruit into the regular army at 16. France and Germany both recruit at 17. Perversely, in the UK, 16-year-olds are required to serve for six years, while 18-year-olds commit themselves to only four. Far from being a curious legal relic, this rule was re-introduced in 2008. After a six-month 'cooling-off' period there is no right to leave. While 'unhappy minors' may leave at the discretion of their commanding officer, the fact that there is no 'discharge as of right' leaves them uniquely open to bullying and makes that bullying more serious if it happens because they cannot leave.

Those supporting the status quo argue that recruitment into the army provides valuable training in a type of 'modern apprenticeship'. It is a way of being paid while learning a trade. Some, like my brother-in-law, who is six foot six and went into the Navy at the age of 15, thrive. He trained as a diver and worked in the North Sea and the Middle East. Others, like privates Sean Benton, Cheryl James, Geoff Gray and James Collinson, who went into the army, don't. They all died of gunshot wounds while training at Princess Royal Barracks, at Deepcut in Surrey between 1995 and 2002. Two of them were 17 years of age. Within that period Surrey Police found 59 incidents of self harm in the Deepcut guardroom logs between 1996 and 2001.

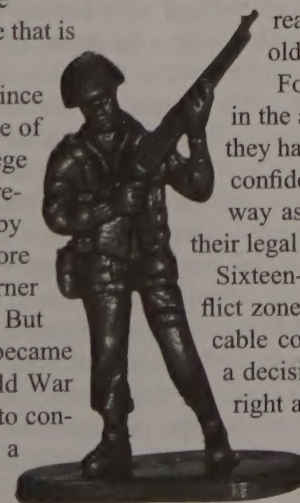
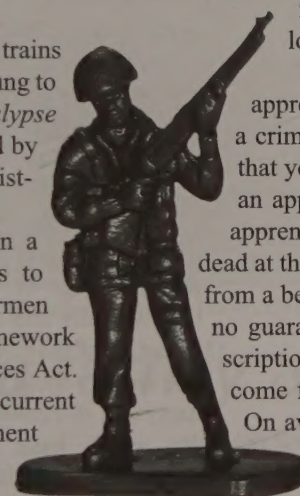
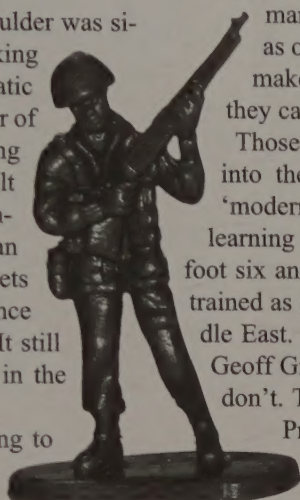
The current regime in the army is unlike any other apprenticeship in that a breach of discipline may lead to a criminal prosecution. It is unlike an apprenticeship in that young soldiers are not free to leave. It is also unlike an apprenticeship in the dangers they face. How many apprentice carpenters, brick layers or plumbers are found dead at their workplace, whether shot in the head or hanging from a beam? An infantryman returning from Helmand has no guarantee of a job. While the UK no longer has conscription, those joining the army at the age of 16 often come from the poorest and least educated backgrounds. On average Army recruits have 0.9 of a GCSE at A-C grade (Defence Committee Evidence 255 Duty of Care Enquiry). Fifty per cent come from a deprived background. About half have skills in reading and maths at or below those of an 11-year-old.

For youngsters without other jobs to go to, a career in the army may be hard to resist. What other choices do they have? Subsequently, they often lack the capacity and confidence to seek a change in their career in the same way as those training for the professions. The nature of their legal status – it is not a contract – makes that worse.

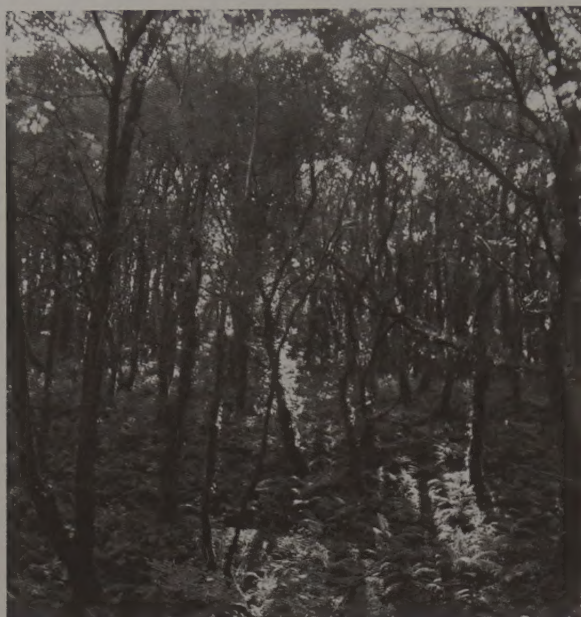
Sixteen- and 17-year-olds are no longer deployed to conflict zones, but decisions made while children have irrevocable consequences as an adult. A young person making a decision at 16, with his or her parents' consent, has no right at the age of 18 to review that decision with an informed conscience.

The army is 'in loco parentis' to its under-18-year-olds. Its responsibility is that of a parent to a child – taking into account their mental age. The present terms of enlistment represent a legal limbo. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the army is obliged

(Continued on back page)



Celebrate government's tree climb-down



THE FOREST OF ENGLAND

by Cliff Reed

In the damp autumn woods,
beautiful and still, lives
the memory of the Wildwood,
the great forest of England.

A squirrel, so it's said,
could travel through
the land from end to end
and never touch the ground.

We think it's gone, but the forest
is still there, waiting to reclaim
the dark earth laid down in the
leaves of countless autumns.

It waits – to connect the scattered
woods and spinneys, the hedgerows
and the field oaks; spreading out from
Sherwood's remnants and from
Epping's.

Even in the city it is waiting,
quietly masquerading as tree-lined
streets and leafy squares, as parks and
shaded gardens and places of the dead.

Before axes of stone and bronze and
iron
the Wildwood fell, but the great forest of
England is still there – you can see it
waiting,
waiting for us to go.

By Cliff Reed

I wrote the poem on the left one November day in 2008 when out walking in the Fynn Valley – a favourite haunt of mine in the countryside just north of Ipswich. I was reminded of it by the extraordinary – and apparently successful – public outcry against government proposals to sell off some of the Forestry Commission's extensive land-holdings. Here in Suffolk, the Commission has sizeable forests on the Sandlings and around Thetford, all of which are very popular for a variety of recreational activities. They are also extremely important for wildlife.

Generally speaking, these forests are actually quite new. Initially, they were planted for the sole purpose of producing timber after the First World War, and consisted mainly of fast-growing alien species of conifer. They were not there to preserve the fragmented pockets of ancient deciduous woodland, some of which are still scattered across the county. Indeed, sometimes the ancient woods were replaced with conifers, much to the detriment of the native flora and fauna.

It was left to the conservation charities – National Trust, Woodland Trust, RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, etc. – to acquire and manage such ancient woodlands as could be saved from agricultural changes, 'development', and unsympathetic leisure activities. But the Forestry Commission has shifted its emphasis in more recent times. Although it is still in the necessary business of producing timber, it has also taken seriously the needs of those who go to the forests for recreation and relaxation, and to enjoy the increasing diversity of their wildlife. These forests are much more interesting places than they used to be, with efforts made to restore some of the habitats that were lost to the plantations. If even part of the Forestry Commission holdings were sold off, it is unlikely that the conservation bodies could afford to buy more than a fraction of them.

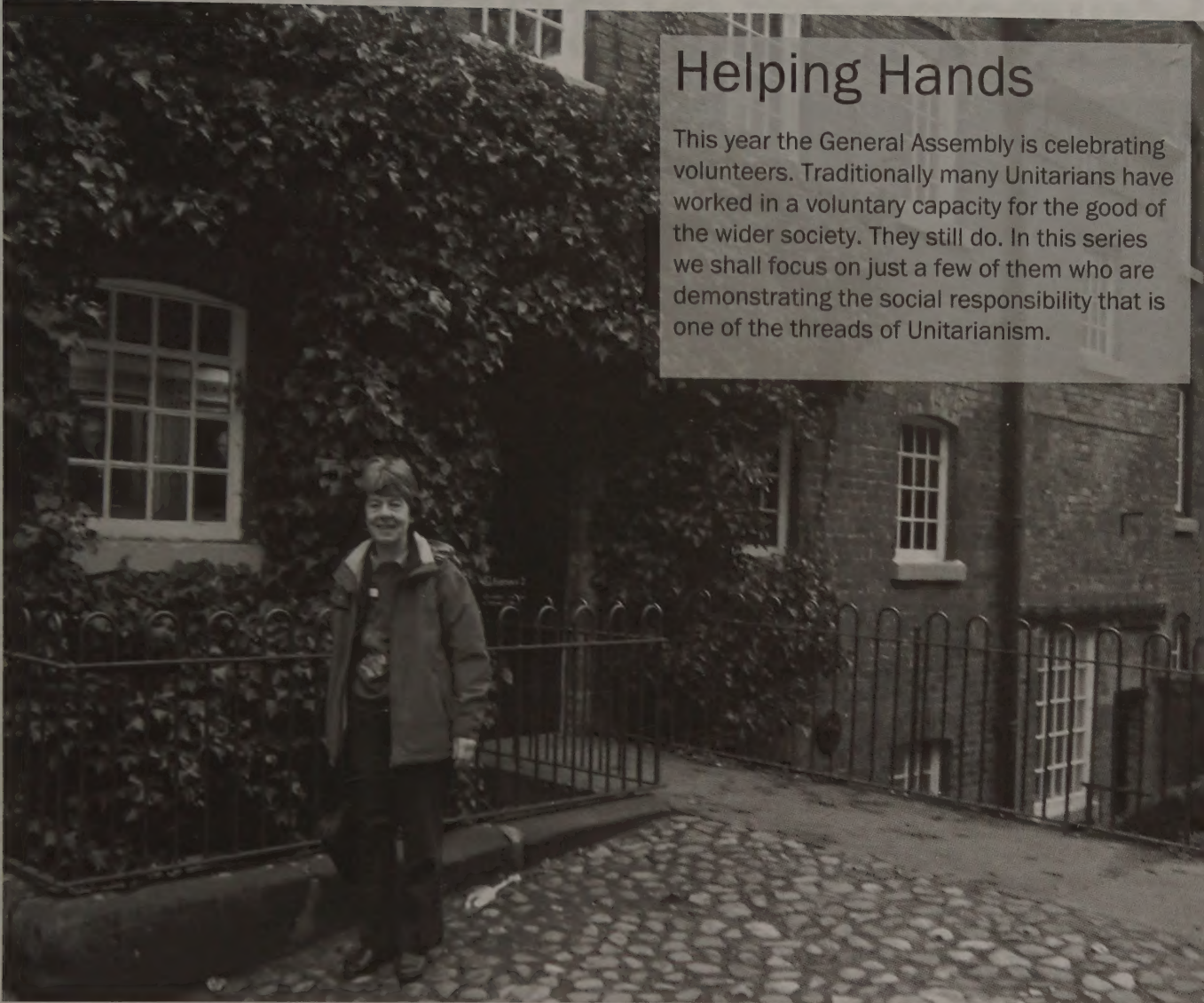
The fear is that the forests, having once passed into purely private ownership, could be closed to the public. Furthermore, new owners might manage the woods in purely commercial ways that threaten their wildlife and amenity value, or even destroy them altogether. These fears may or may not have been exaggerated, but the fact is that we care about our forests. We don't want to lose them because of hasty and ill-considered political decisions. In an urbanised society, our woods have acquired an almost spiritual significance. We associate them with an ancient, part-mythical, past – when Druids conducted their sacred rites in the oak groves, or when Robin Hood and his company of outlawed freedom-fighters defied oppression from the depths of Sherwood.

The forest has come to represent our threatened connection with Nature and our deliverance from both bland suburbia and the urban jungle. And as we see countries across the world being stripped of their forests, with catastrophic results, we become that much more protective of what remains of our own. And the crazy thing is that forests are not a luxury, they are an indispensable resource in all manner of ways. To degrade and destroy them is not 'progress', as some still seem to think, it is lunacy. Our own great forests are long gone and we must make do with what little we've got left. We are right to care what happens to our woods. And we are right to think of them in spiritual terms too. As Pelagius wrote some 1700 years ago, perhaps recalling the beautiful oak woods of his native Wales:

"Look at the animals roaming the forest: God's spirit dwells within them.

Look at the great trees of the forest; look at the wild flowers and the grass in the fields; look even at your crops. God's spirit is present within all plants as well."

The Rev Cliff Reed is minister at Ipswich.



Helping Hands

This year the General Assembly is celebrating volunteers. Traditionally many Unitarians have worked in a voluntary capacity for the good of the wider society. They still do. In this series we shall focus on just a few of them who are demonstrating the social responsibility that is one of the threads of Unitarianism.

Ruth Taylor, a member of Norcliffe Chapel, at the Quarry Bank Mill. Photo by Kate Taylor.

Volunteering is a family affair for Taylors

By Kate Taylor

'It is incredible to work in a place where everyone else knows about Unitarians,' says Ruth Taylor, who gives as many as four days a week to serve as a volunteer for the National Trust at Quarry Bank Mill and Styal Estate in Cheshire. As many as 200 children can visit the site on any school day.

The mill itself, its Apprentice House, and its village were all developed from 1784 by Samuel Greg who married into a prominent Unitarian family and brought up his children as Unitarians. In 1823 Greg provided Norcliffe Chapel – where Ruth and her husband Philip are members – firmly in the Free Christian tradition for his workpeople. The estate was given to the National Trust in 1939.

Ruth, a former Maths teacher, has assisted at Quarry Bank since 1992. Her work is primarily as a guide for school groups pursuing aspects of the National Curriculum. For Key Stage 2 they explore the life and working conditions of Victorian children. At the next stage they look at the change from domestic to industrial working lives. Older children following Key Stage 4 are concerned with such issues as whether the Gregs were good employers or why the mill was sited where it is.

For the last 10 years Ruth has also been responsible for organising the environmental education programme at Styal. This provides two-hour sessions for groups of 10 or 12

children and offers such options as river study, map-reading, woodland, or 'mini-beasts'. Ruth trains the guides, organises their rota, and looks after the equipment and worksheets.

Helping at Styal is something of a family affair. Ruth's husband takes charge of all the recycling. There are cardboard boxes from the shop, waste paper and out-of-date leaflets from the office, and glass and plastic bottles from the restaurant as well as compost material. Philip sorts it all for the appropriate skips or adds it to the compost-heap in the Apprentice House garden. Ruth and Philip's daughter, Jenni, has worked at Styal as a student both in a paid and voluntary capacity.

A fellow-member of the Norcliffe Chapel congregation, Heather Brown, also serves as a guide at the mill and on environmental programmes.

Ruth can trace her own Unitarian ancestry back to the 19th century. Like so many people who serve as volunteers, Ruth enjoys the chance to meet people from a wide variety of places and backgrounds and she particularly likes working with children, seeing how much they get from their visit.

Kate Taylor is a member at Wakefield.

The series on honouring Unitarian volunteers will continue through the General Assembly meetings at Swansea. If you are a volunteer with an interesting story to tell, contact Kate at kate@airtime.co.uk

Summer School offers

Registration is open for Summer School 2011 to be held at the Nightingale Unitarian Conference Centre at Great Hucklow from 20-27 August, with the theme 'Walking the Talk: Living Our Unitarian Values'. Below are some reflections of participants in last year's school. For more information or to register, see:

www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

Many views – one spiritual home

The atmosphere at Hucklow Summer School was immediately welcoming. Clearly, there were many people who had been and enjoyed the summer school before. We newcomers, with our bejewelled nametags, were spotted and shown the ropes. It was beneficial to be with the same small engagement group every morning, to discuss our spiritual journeys through the structure of the 'Building Your Own Theology' programme. The afternoon optional activities and mealtimes gave us a chance to make new connections with the rest of the participants.

There were many highlights throughout the week. In particular, I enjoyed wrapping myself in blankets and watching the rain from inside the 'chill out tent'; walking in the beautiful Peak District; and sharing haiku and 'credo' belief statements at our final engagement group workshop. The group projects such as the knitted garden and the doodling were also fun.

At the beginning of the week, I was surprised to hear others referring to the theme of 'Speaking of God' as controversial. Coming from a non-religious background, I have my personal definition of God but no great hang-ups about using that word in particular. The summer school opened my eyes to the fact that the Unitarian movement is even more diverse than I originally thought!

Many people, many views, many names, but one spiritual home.

Kate Buchanan (Hampstead)

Taking ideas back home

This year I had a chance to go to Summer School at last. Hucklow Summer School was first mentioned to me by Unitarian friends in Kensington back in 2008, but for one reason or another I wasn't able to go then, nor the following year. In 2009 I attended the Engagement Group Training event in Great Hucklow, which was my first time at the Nightingale Centre, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. So when I applied for the 2010 Summer School I was really looking forward to going.

When choosing a morning engagement group, I was mainly guided by what I thought might benefit my own congregation in North Wales, the newly established *Undodiaid Bangor Unitarians*. I chose 'Building Your Own Theology'. In this workshop we explored our faiths and values by reflecting on our life experience, as well as texts and poems. I immensely enjoyed the creative elements of the course, such as drawing images of the Divine and writing haikus. However, at the end of the workshop we were asked to form a detailed credo statement, which I opted out of – it simply wouldn't have been authentic for me – as it didn't conform to my perception of the Divine as ineffable and fluid.

What else did I find inspiring? The Theme Talks certainly provided 'food for thought' and the children's stories were fun even for the adults. The silences gave us the space to experience God / the Divine in the Here and Now.

One of my favourite optional activities was Creative Dancing,



Participants in Summer School 2010 gathered at the Nightingale School theme is 'Walking the Talk: Living our Unitarian Values'

which involved dancing the Creation Myth! Another great experience was the early morning meditation sessions, which allowed us to experiment with a range of different techniques. I found the taster session of the 'Heart to Heart' course (a UU publication by Christine Robinson and Alicia Hawkins), where we shared milestones from our life stories, very moving.

The full course helps people to develop deep listening skills and is something I would very much like to offer in my own congregation. Summer School has also highlighted for me the importance of ritual. Walking in silence to the Chapel carrying a lantern and gathering for Epilogue was an unforgettable experience. What stays with me most of all, though, is the deep connection with Unitarians from so many different places.

I will definitely come again.

Rita Woditsch (Undodiaid Bangor Unitarians)

A challenging theme engaged

This was going to be my third Summer School. Having missed the previous year I was looking forward to seeing old friends again and making new ones as well as to a mentally and spiritually stimulating week. However, there was a problem – the theme was 'Speaking of God'. 'God' was part of the language of the Anglicanism which I had rejected in my teens, when I stopped going to church because I realised I was an atheist.

It was by chance, seven years ago, that I realised that Unitarianism would give me a way of recognising and celebrating a spiritual dimension in my life but 'God' remained an uncomfortable word.

However, my anxiety was misplaced. A series of very

With, friendship and fun



Conference Centre in Great Hucklow. This year's Summer School was led by Ned Prideaux

different, thought provoking, and intellectually demanding theme talks on 'God' inspired the start of the inner dialogue that I had been avoiding. The engagement group on the theme of 'Icons', so-called because for centuries icons have offered images of the divine, gave us the opportunity to make things, to reflect and to write and to share our ideas of God.

We explored an aspect of the divine through a different activity every day. Things we found in the countryside around us were used to make a garden for our chalice, microscopes revealed remarkable order and complexity in fragments of plants, 'wax resist' painting helped us to consider 'where God is not', we painted plaster masks of our faces to suggest the face of God, we found the divine in communal activity when together we changed raw wool into a felt wall-hanging, and finally we celebrated what we had learnt about God.

For me, the process of making things quietened my very vocal inner critic and made reflecting on the divine more enjoyable than it would otherwise have been. The efficient organisation of the group, the excellent choice of readings and quotations, the openness and warmth of everyone involved, all these contributed to the success of this engagement group.

On top of the main activities were the memorable and enjoyable optional activities such as dancing the creation of the world, clambering over a tractor on an 'easy' country walk, and singing everyone's favourite hymn. The shared worship sessions were varied, interesting and moving; we were even related to the idea of God as an onion (you had to be there!). Overall it was a wonderful week (and the word 'God' no longer makes me feel uncomfortable).

Chris Thompson (Kingswood)



Young people's group was cool

If you are a Unitarian kid and want to come to summer school, then what are you waiting for! Okay, so they say it is for adults, and you have to bring your parents or one of them. But really, don't tell anyone, but it's for kids. We have lots of fun activities. More fun than the adults who seem to talk a lot and sing us kids out. (By the way, that's not cool. We like it better when you just tell us to clear off!) I have been to Summer School twice and the last time I went, us kids made masks which was so cool! We went to the woods to talk and explore nature. I'm a city kid so it was kind of fun, except for the dirt but I learnt some good stuff. We also went on the computers to do some research about animals, and especially about the animal we made a mask about. I was a beautiful black and white cat, but we had a mountain tiger, meerkat, mountain wolf and cougar. So we designed an island for all of us to live on, in peace and harmony. Although one animal did like to set traps on the island, we all survived together.

Each day the food got better and better. Usually after dinner we kids played outside. I made lots of awesome new friends and our leaders were good fun. One of my friends, her dad was our leader and he pushed us really high on the swings that we almost went over the top! We also did the Danny Twist or the Clare Splat. All moves named after my new friends. Sometimes in the evenings we went for a walk, joined in with the adult activities (lots of art/craft things) or played board or card games. I learnt some new games and have tried it with my friends since I have gotten home. I didn't go to the epilogue every night, but when I did we would walk to the Chapel with lanterns but we would have to be silent. It would be better if we had some good ghost stories as we walked in the dark. On the last night, we have a disco, and got dressed up. Us girls looked the best and danced the best! There was some crazy dancing going on.

One of the things I remembered the most was in the chapel when Lindy (the Rev Lindy Latham) said, "And then God appeared." All of us kids looked up and God didn't appear. So she said it again and it took a while, for the Minister (the Rev Michael Dadson) to appear over the pulpit and everyone laughed. It was great making new friends but also good to see old ones too! That's Summer School, so come along.

Xaymca Erin Marie Gordon (Birmingham New Meeting)

Hucklow Summer School 2010 had the theme 'Speaking of God: Unitarian Adventures in Theology' – a rich and challenging topic which proved to be very rewarding. Audio versions of the theme talks can be downloaded for free from the website: www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

Reaching for faith beyond words

The Rev Danny Crosby is in his first year of Unitarian ministry. This is the first in an occasional series of columns. —ed.

By Danny Crosby

I wonder sometimes if we as a tradition are too fixated on words. I wonder if we in fact worship the word to the detriment of other forms of expression. I think I do. I'm more comfortable with words than with silence, music and imagery. Even the music I love and listen to is song. I don't really listen to music without words. I've never appreciated music for music's sake. As a young man I detested dance music I saw it as far less worthy than song. I know now that I was missing out.

Paul Tillich claimed that whatever reveals 'Ultimate Reality' ('Others call it God') also hides it. If this is the case, then worship that neglects artistic expression and imagery fails to fully reach those experiencing it. During my time at Altrincham and Urmston I have become increasingly aware that the worship I create is predominantly word-based; granted nothing like as much as it used to be, but still too much. I am learning the value of space and other media but I do not yet think I have fully learnt the value of the image or sound, although I am more open to it than I used to be. 'Progress not perfection.'

There is of course a history of distrust of artistic expression within some strands of religion. Within Christianity, there have always been those who have been suspicious of art and aesthetics in general. This essentially stems from the fear of idolatry and the physical form. Throughout the church's history, attacks on art have been made. The early church faced the iconoclast controversy. Here biblical authority was drawn on to support the claim that to venerate icons in worship was idolatrous. During the reformation, figures such as John Calvin claimed that there was no place for images within worship. The fear stemmed from the belief that imagery would be a distraction from listening to the word of God through scripture. The word has maintained primacy since the reformation, certainly within the Protestant tradition. Even within our tradition, where authority is held within the conscience of the individual and not the scripture, the preached word is still central to our worship.

Surely, if Tillich is correct in claiming 'that which reveals also hides', our worship must be lacking something by focusing primarily on the word, spoken or sung. Is there enough space for mystery and imagination in our worship? Have we fallen into the trap of idolising words, or worse still, the preacher? Have we become 'preacherphiles'? I hope not. Words alone are limited because they fail to connect with people in a truly holistic manner. They fail to reach those parts at the core of a person's being that aesthetic communication can. Art reveals a greater reality that cannot be achieved by words alone.

Today I see God in everything, not separate or distant from life but within it.

I do not believe that I could ever have reached that conclusion by simply reading or hearing words alone.

A few years ago I experienced several life changing spiritual experiences. As a result I began to explore religion and spirituality in an attempt to make sense of what had happened to me. One of the places I use to visit was the Holy Name church opposite the university on Oxford Road in Manchester. I would go there almost every lunchtime, just to sit quietly and pray. While there I kept being drawn to The 'Sacred Heart' icon of Jesus. I became fixated



Danny Crosby

by the glowing heart at its centre; it brought me an incredible sense of peace and connection. At the same time I was meditating on some words in the book 'Alcoholics Anonymous'. The words were: 'We finally saw that faith in some kind of God was a part of our make-up, just as much as the feeling we have for a friend. Sometimes we had to search fearlessly, but he was there. He was as much a fact as we were. We found the great Reality deep down within us. In the last analysis it is only there that He may be found. It was so with us.' My problem had been my inability to fully accept this reality within me, but I could see it in someone else: my friend Claire's son Ethan. Over the weeks of meditating on these three things together, I began to accept that the sacred heart in Jesus and in Ethan truly was in me. As a result I was finally able to make some sense of the changes that had taken place within me. Today I see God in everything, not separate or distant from life but within it. I do not believe that I could ever have reached that conclusion by simply reading or hearing words alone.

I agree with Tillich in his assertion that that which reveals 'Ultimate Reality' also blocks it. Nothing, whether that is art, the written or spoken word, personal experience or nature can fully reveal 'Ultimate Reality'. I suspect that it is actually beyond our human capacity, I know it's beyond mine. That said I believe that we can move closer to our own true natures, one another, all that is life and that that runs through life, which I call God, by fully engaging all our senses and appreciating and expressing all the gifts that have been bestowed upon us. Whilst at the same time not making idols of any of them.

Experience has taught me that imagery and artistic expression enhance my experience of the Divine and yet I still create worship that is almost wholly word-based. Hopefully in time I will have the courage to create worship that touches those parts that the word alone cannot reach.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel, Altrincham and Queens Road Unitarian Free Church, Urmston.

Inspiration from the Middle East

New truths from old words: Jesus' teachings in the desert wisdom context

By Alan Heeks

It seems a natural part of the Unitarian approach to seek the common truths shared by different faiths. The desert landscape and culture of the Middle East have inspired several major religions: notably Christianity, Islam and Judaism, but there are others, such as Zoroastrianism.

If we imagine the religious landscape as a high mountain where the headwaters of these faiths arise. The pure streams at their origin have deep similarities, but these streams become lowland rivers – meaning the religions which have evolved over time. The religions look quite different from each other, but if we go back to the source – the original teaching, in its original language – we can see more depth and much more commonality in these desert wisdom teachings.

A key quality in these teachings is compassion. Jesus spoke Aramaic, and Muhammad spoke Arabic, both use the same word for compassion – *rahm*. In the first line of the Qur'an, which some say embodies the essence of the whole book, this word appears twice, *bismillah er-rahman er-rahim*: these are the giving and receiving aspects of compassion.

Part of the inspirational power of these languages is that words have multiple meanings, and many words expressing a quality also have a related physical meaning, so that the teachings are very grounded and immediate. It reminds us that many of those who first heard these teachings were peasants, fisherman, nomads, who lived in close harmony with nature.

My doorway to this field has been the book *Desert Wisdom* by Neil Douglas-Klotz, who is both a leading scholar and a teacher with a deep and simple wisdom. This book has extended renderings of key texts from many spiritual traditions of this region, plus illuminating notes explaining the roots and sound meanings of key words, and 'body prayers': practices to enable us to experience these teachings more deeply.

Neil explains that the word *rahm* means not only compassion, but also the womb or belly. The two meanings are deeply connected – they suggest that this quality of mercy must be gestated and born from the deep, dark creative centre within.

In the fifth Beatitude Jesus uses *rahm* twice. The Aramaic original is *Tubwayhun lamrahmane dalayhun nehwun rahme*. The King James Version is, *Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy*. This is correct, but misses the vivid physicality and broader intent of the original. Neil in his book offers five translations to encompass the full meaning: here are two of them.

Ripe are those who from their inner wombs birth mercy; they shall sense the relief of all prayers answered. Ripe are those who from their inner wombs birth illumination; upon, around, and within them will the Cosmic Body shine.

In earlier times, the range of practices by which people experienced and expressed the desert wisdom faiths were more diverse and more active than in the later religious forms. Chanting while moving or dancing is an example of this, and we can approach this way of body prayer through the Dances of Universal Peace, which include many key phrases from the desert wisdom teachings, in the original languages. There is a dance cycle for the Aramaic Lord's Prayer, and this is one of



Alan Heeks

the most profound devotional prayer experiences I have had. The steps are like simple circle dances, with the added power of singing the prayer as one dances.

Jesus' Aramaic teachings will be explored further in a service I am leading at Bridport Unitarian Church on 13 March.

I am leading a weekend retreat on Desert Wisdom near Salisbury March 25 – 27: more information at www.living-organically.com

Alan Heeks is a member of Bridport Unitarians.

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Letters to the Editor

Unitarians are already 'happy'

To the Editor:

I was very surprised reading 'Should we get happy-clappy?' (*Inquirer*, 5 February) that Sue Woolley seemed to think Unitarians appeared to 'lack joy' and were 'uninvolved' in services.

I have been a member of the Plymouth congregation for three years, and neither of these phrases would seem at all appropriate here! There is almost always laughter during a service. There is lots of congregational participation with readings, responsive prayers and personal viewpoints.

Knowing nothing of Unitarianism when I first came to a service it was this feeling of inclusiveness, friendliness, freedom and tolerance of all viewpoints that first drew me in.

Marianne Beale

Saltash, Cornwall

Happiness comes in many guises

To the Editor:

Re Sue Woolley's 'Should we get happy-clappy?'

I too have been to an evangelical service, with many young people, much enthusiasm, dancing, arm-waving etc. There's no doubting their sincerity and success. Well, we Unitarians are not perfect and perhaps we could learn from them, but my experience of 40 years attending Unitarian services is that we find amongst us sadness, anxiety, concern, learning, an attempt to understand our human condition, and interaction with our neighbours; however their feelings may be affecting them.

Not everyone is happy. But happiness – and perhaps, even better, a sharing of emotional strength – can be grown from a seed of sympathy, making time to listen and communicate. And I've often had a good laugh in a Unitarian service as well.

Judy Hague

Upper Chapel Sheffield

Yes, our faith should make us happy

To the Editor:

Should Unitarians get happy? Yes, yes, yes! Sue Woolley's article in the 5 February *Inquirer* identified something really important. Worship should be

joyful and emotionally and spiritually involving. Daniel Costley's article also points to something important: worship should mediate the power and the presence of the Divine.

It is interesting that the same weekend those articles came out, here at Bank Street Chapel, Bolton, we started a monthly intergenerational service featuring lots of songs, stories, and yes, even tambourines! And why not? In addition to that, we have weekly meditative worship with music and long periods of silence.

Unitarianism has been stuffy and boring for too long. When visitors come to our congregations they should be met with a people who are filled with the joy of their faith; a faith that makes a difference in their lives and the world; they should meet the tangible presence of God. That's what matters.

Stephen Lingwood

Minister, Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, Bolton

Involvement in services makes a difference

I have just been reading Sue Woolley's article in *The Inquirer*. Following two of the very useful sessions at Kingswood that Sue facilitated, I stuck to my computer a label bearing the following thoughts to keep in mind when writing services:

Think about what people will take away
Space for personal reflection

Involvement

Droplets of silence

And I garnered on other occasions:

"Church" should be a verb not a noun
We are taught to see something of God in everyone that we meet.

When I put together a service I try to incorporate as many of these as possible.

In her article Sue wrote: 'The thing that struck me about (a Baptist service) was how much the congregation was involved in the service and I do feel that *Involvement* is very important, possibly the most important.'

I prefer not to do my own readings but to get members of the congregation to volunteer to do them. I try to have the thought for the chalice lighting and the benediction said communally. If I am going to use the Prayer of Jesus I ask someone else to lead it. I am not very good at responsive/shared

prayers but I do include them if I can. I read somewhere that at one church one member of the congregation was invited to bring along a reading for each service. I am not sure about that but I am now thinking of perhaps asking members in advance to volunteer to say a prayer of their choice.

The Shrewsbury congregation is not backward in coming forward and many of the ministers and service leaders who take services for us are very good at directing questions or comments to get informal responses from us.

Once a month we have 'candles of joy and concern' which gives everyone a chance to become involved. Also once a month we hold a Circle Service, led by a member of the congregation, to which all are invited to bring readings, music and thoughts. I am currently pushing for 'Sing Your Faith' services as we have just received our purple hymnbooks. I think we could learn some new hymns and people could indicate in advance which ones they want us all to learn.

Perhaps for a couple of issues we could have an "involvement" quarter-page in *The Inquirer* where people could share ideas on creating 'emotional involvement'.

Dorothy Haughton

Shrewsbury Unitarian Church

Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF.

Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes.

Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.

Theresa Taylor

Theresa Taylor

Theresa Taylor died peacefully at home on Sunday, 13 February, aged 84 years. She was attended by family and friends and will be missed by many in the Unitarian community in Scotland and beyond. The chapel at Maryhill Crematorium was full of family, neighbours, Unitarians from the four Scottish congregations, and people who knew her during her very active life. The service included her favourite hymn, *Song of Peace*, and one of her favourite Aberdeen folk songs, *The Lum Hat Wantin' a Croon*, as well as Rabindranath Tagore's meditation on death. Theresa is survived by her two children, three grandchildren, and a sister.

Theresa was born in Glasgow but raised in Aberdeen. She was a member of the Aberdeen church and became very active in the Glasgow church when she moved there in 1963. She was the Chair of the Committee, President of the Scottish Unitarian Association, and very



active in the Women's League, being national President of the League. At UK level she was a regular attendee at Annual Meetings and represented Scotland on the GA Council. Her own theological position was as a confirmed agnostic but she worked closely and supportively with those of a more traditional stance.

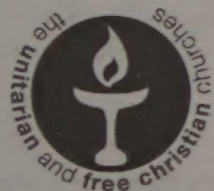
She will be remembered for her forthright manner, her generosity, and her willingness to actively take part rather than just observe. When she retired from her work (involving administration and finance) she was a voluntary worker for the CAB and did other charitable work. Her determination to stay active and in touch led her during the past 18 months to install a chair lift at home, purchase a computer and wifi and learn to use them, and also to purchase a disability scooter so she could get out in the neighbourhood without imposing on her very supportive neighbours.

— John Clifford

Enneagram workshop planned

Enneagram is a personality assessment system to help us learn more about ourselves and others, to enable better relationships with family, friends, work colleagues and committees. Josephine Seccombe, member of Oxford Unitarians, will facilitate an Enneagram workshop on Sat 14 May, 10 am to 4pm at the South Hinksey village hall, off A34, Oxford. The cost is £10. Please bring packed lunch. Drinks are provided. There is a free car park.

A follow-up course, 'Going Further in the Enneagram' is planned for 16-18 September at Ivy House, Warminster. This is for people who have already done a basic Enneagram course and would like to explore further. Accommodation is £96, programme deposit is £20. For more info and to secure place contact Kathy Beckett kathy@kpb.gotadsl.co.uk



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Pantydefaid holds successful auction

Pantydefaid Unitarian Chapel in the heart of Ceredigion was the venue of a sumptuous supper early in February. Members of the branch Women's League under the guidance of Ann and Alan Jones prepared a three-course meal for 150 people. The tables at the social hall were beautifully decorated and members of the League, young people and male members of the congregation acted as waiters and servers. It was obvious that a great deal of training had been arranged for them and most restaurants and hotels would have been only too glad to employ them.

This was a money-raising effort on behalf of the chapel in order to improve toilet facilities and access for the disabled in the hall.

The meal was followed by an auction conducted by the Rev Wyn Thomas when almost 40 items were offered for sale. They included items donated by individuals, local shops and businesses in the area – from an MOT and a “hair do” to paintings by local artists, food hampers and bottles of wine. The bidding was brisk and a grand total of just over £2,700 was made.

Dilys Evans, the National League President addressed the diners in an amusing vein and everyone felt that it had been a really worthwhile effort.

– Eric Jones



Highland Place church celebrates

A dinner, with guest speakers Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas and Roy Noble, took place recently in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the opening, in December 1860, of Highland Place Unitarian Church, Aberdare.

The guests were warmly welcomed by the Rev Eric Jones and introduced to those assembled, by the Chairman of the Congregation, Humphrey Evans.

In his speech, which was given mostly in Welsh, Dafydd Elis Thomas referred to the pioneering influence of Unitarians in the fields of education, social reform and industry. He cited the achievement of Walter Coffin, the first nonconformist and Unitarian to be elected as a Member of Parliament, for Cardiff. He also paid tribute to the former Unitarian industrialists of Aberdare and Merthyr in creat-

ing work for the local population.

Dafydd Elis Thomas also expressed his affection for the creativity of Iolo Morganwg and Richard Price of Tyn-ton who became a Unitarian Minister at Newington Green Unitarian Church in London, where Lord Elis Thomas' son currently worships. He begged the question as to where we would be today were it not for the vision and bravery of the radical dissenting movement.

Roy Noble, a native of Brynaman, reminisced on the influence of chapel life in the days of his youth. He too paid tribute to the Unitarians of the Cynon Valley, and beyond, for their innovative spirit. Finally Roy amused those present with some stories from the past.

– Ella P Lewis-Jones

Stop recruiting 16-year-old soldiers

(Continued from page 3)

to consider the best interests of the child. Yet there is little independent oversight of this responsibility. A young soldier to write to the Children's Rights Commissioner would be brave indeed. In enlisting in the army, recruits become subject to military discipline under subsidiary legislation made under the Army Act 1955. But how many semi-literate teenagers read subsidiary legislation?

The present situation is a throwback to the 19th-century era of indentured labour. The argument that the age of recruitment should be raised to 18 is sometimes seen as a purely pacifist argument. That is not the case. If 21st-century armies are to become not the means of waging war but forces for the resolution of conflict, and for policing resolutions of the United Nations, it will require a level of maturity and discernment that depends on all those entering it making an informed and considered choice. A consistent age of adult responsibility would mean that formal enlistment into the army takes place at 18 – the age of legal responsibility and not before. In the

meantime, only a right of discharge for all under-18-year-olds and a requirement that 18-year-olds make a clear and informed choice, on their 18th birthday, will conform to 21st-century standards of human rights.

The Unitarian General Assembly's Faith and Public Issues Commission (F&PIC) has been working alongside the Quakers to end under-18 recruitment. F&PIC is supporting the Early Day Motion in the media and in Parliament. Sir Peter Soulsby, member of the GA Executive Committee is one of the MP's who has signed it. This article originally appeared in The Friend, the national magazine for Quakers in Britain. Michael Bartlett is parliamentary liaison secretary for the Quakers' Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM), the charity that is responsible for the centrally organised Quaker work.

If you support this campaign and this concern, write to your constituency MP and/or local newspaper urging the government to give discharge 'as of right' to all under-18-year-olds as a first step to raising the age of enlistment to the age of 18.

